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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series IV: Sermons, 1914-1963, undated.

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How Can Christian and Jew Help One Another?, 1924.



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"HOW CAN CHRISTIAN AND JEW HELP ONE ANOTHER?"

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING.

DECEMBER 28, 1924, CLEVELAND.

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Christian-Jewish relations have passed through three stages: the stage of conflict, the stage of toleration, and the stage of cooperation. In some parts of the world even the second stage has not yet been reached. In most parts of the world there is great hesitancy to advance to the third inevitable stage. It might be well to remember that the problem of racial and religious adjustment is not peculiar to the Jew in his relation to the gentile world. Every race and every religion, especially if it is a small race and a minority religion, faces the same problem.

In the case of the Jew the problem is accentuated because the Jew is not only a small race and a minority religion, but also a homeless race. Homelessness made him the victim of many circumstances, which, if he had not been a stranger among peoples, he would not have been called upon to endure. Homelessness made him weak, and weakness is always an incitement to cruelty, if it is not an appeal to pity. Then again, the Jew was never domiciled in any one place since his exile, so that even when fortune smiled upon him in one land, the likelihood was that it frowned upon him in some one or other land in some one corner of the earth. So that the records of our people show conditions of oppression and persecution in some part of the world at almost any given moment.

But the problem of racial and religious



✓ adjustment is not uniquely Jewish and is not peculiar to the Jew alone. It is universal; it applies to all.

The first stage, then, in human contacts is the stage of conflict--the jungle stage. The assumption underlying this conflict is that the existence of another race as strong and powerful as mine is a menace to me, and that my existence is dependent upon the weakening or the extermination of every other race. I can live only at the expense of others. For a nation to be truly great, for a race fully to realize its destiny, it must, as a matter of course, subject to its domination every other race. And this point of view leads logically to the idea of empire. Every people in ancient days--and I suppose every people in modern days--entertained and entertain the vision of empire, whether it is the empire dream of Babylon and Assyria or Great Britain; whether it is the empire fashioned by Alexander, Hannibal or Napoleon, or the House of Commons. The philosophy underlying imperialism is one and the same, namely, that the greatness of a people depends upon the smallness of every other people. The world was made to be a political unit governed by one masterful race or nation.

That, in brief, is the idea informing all forms of imperialism. In olden days, when most people were less sophisticated and more honest than they are today, they did not attempt to offer any proofs or arguments or justifications for this conception of imperialism. The only proof that they offered was the proof of arms, of force, which in those



days, as in our days, was proof sufficient. They were able to carry out their program, and therefore the program was a true and just program. Nowadays the moral sense of mankind is a little more refined, and nations feel themselves under the constraint and compulsion of finding some moral justification for this same primitive hankering after dominion and mastery, and so they invent a lot of scientific fiction and they present it to a duped world with a great deal of eclat, as if it were a new revelation: the ideal of racial superiority; the biologic necessity, and therefore the moral necessity, of the great and the superior race to impose its regime, its administration and its control upon every other people and race. The reasons vary, the justifications change from generation to generation, but the underlying motive is one--domination and control and exploitation; and the underlying philosophy is one--conflict.

The novel relation between races and peoples is one of conflict; destroy or be destroyed; rule or be ruled; master or be enslaved. Now, in matters of religion that same thing obtains. You will recall, of course, that religion, all religion, was once upon a time state religion. Religion was a tool of the state. Whatever the state or the race or the nation hankered after, that religion sanctioned and moralized over it. Religion, too, was regarded from the point of view of empire. My religion, the religion of my race, is the only true religion. We are in possession of the only true revelation. Every other revelation, therefore, is



spurious and every other religion is a menace and a challenge and a threat and a blasphemy. Religion is something ready-made, complete, perfected, absolute, and entrusted into my keeping, into the charge and the keeping of my race. And mankind waded through seas of blood to establish the futility, the unsoundness of religious imperialism. But up to very recently, and in many parts of the world to this very day, loyalty to all religion is assumed to be suspicion of, and at times active hate of every other religion. In the old days they went to war about it. The Koran or the sword; the cross or the autodafe. Nowadays they send missionaries; nowadays religions engage in propaganda at the expense of other religions; nowadays religious leaders engage in apologetics, extolling the virtues of their faith at the expense of every other faith. The methods vary, the reasons are different; the objective is one--domination and control; and the philosophy is one--conflict, struggle.

The second stage in human relationships is the stage of toleration. When races realized that it is physically impossible for one people to impose its will and its control permanently upon all other people, when it became evident that world dominion is impossible, then the nations began to think of tolerating one another. Toleration was not the result of civilization. Toleration did not come about because nations became more civilized, because of the growth of good will and morality among nations. Not at all. It was the iron law of necessity; it was the cold, cruel fact of the



collapse of imperialism which made nations tolerant of one another to a degree, because they are not yet fully tolerant of one another. The League of Nations, such as it is, was brought about not by human good will, not by a growth in finer sensibilities among peoples and nations, not by their sudden realization that toleration is more moral, nobler, finer than conflict. Not at all. It came about as a consequence of the most disastrous, bloodiest defeat of the idea of imperialism in the history of mankind. It was war that fashioned it.

And equally so among religions. That religions are a little more tolerant of one another today is not due to the fact that they are more civilized, but it is simply due to the fact that they have realized the futility of religious imperialism. It took Europe a hundred years of war. The dance of death had to sweep over the whole of Europe, disseminating, devastating two-thirds of it, before the Treaty of Westphalia was signed permitting dissenters the right to worship God as they pleased. And if the Jew is tolerated today it is not due so much to the fact that peoples and religions and nations are more civilized; civilization is the consequence and not the cause of it; it is due to the fact that peoples and religions have realized the hopelessness of resorting to the arbitrament of steel in matters spiritual; the hopelessness of crushing a religious and racial minority which wills to live; because the Jew is the supreme testimony of the indestructibility of minorities who will to live. From the days of Antiochus the Syrian to the days of Nicholas the Slav,



twenty centuries conspired to absorb or to destroy this nettlesome, this disturbing, this irksome, this little minority and faith. And so when the world realized that it could not destroy it, it decided to tolerate it. That is the second stage in human contacts.

The third stage is one of cooperation, the stage which is yet to be reached. The difference between toleration and cooperation is this: you may tolerate your neighbor without at all being concerned in his well-being; you may be indifferent to his needs; you may even actively dislike him. You tolerate him because you cannot help it. Cooperation implies an active interest in the well-being of your neighbor based upon a realization of your common interdependence, based upon the realization that your well-being is, in a sense, determined by his well-being. Cooperation among races and peoples means the recognition that no people and no race is self-sufficient; that the weakness of one rather than the strength of one is the menace to the other.

The sources of war in the world today, the plague spots of humanity today whence all conflict arises, are not the strong nations, the politically independent nations, but the weak nations, the politically dependent nations--the Balkans and Asia Minor and the Far East and Africa; the weak peoples, the peoples which have not yet found themselves politically. These are the sources of all wars in the last three generations, because their very weakness invites exploitation, and the great powers begin to fight among them-



selves for the privilege of this exploitation. And so it is part of the scheme of the well-being of the strong to strengthen the weak. Cooperation among races is possible only when these races are equal, and it becomes the concern of every nation to see to it that every other nation is politically self-reliable and politically strong.

Now, cooperation between Jew and gentile will come about only when the gentile will recognize that his well-being depends upon the well-being of the Jew, and the Jew will recognize that his well-being depends upon the general weal and wholesomeness of the gentile world. Cooperation recognizes equality and individual entities. Cooperation does not mean the absorption and assimilation, the merging of the one into the other, the loss of identity on the part of the other. Cooperation is possible among equals, and only as the Jew remains spiritually, morally, mentally, intellectually strong, alert, creative, can he hope for helpful cooperation on the part of the non-Jewish world.

A great mind in America, the president emeritus of Harvard, President Eliot, with a keen insight grasps this truth, in an address which he delivered recently before a group of students at Harvard college. He first calls upon the Jew, if they wish to share in the commonalty of life, to become physically strong, to cease being a begging and pleading people, but to develop themselves so that they can put their back against the wall, as he says, and defend themselves. And then he speaks of racial assimilation. "You



doubtless have heard a great deal of talk in this country during the last five or six years about the assimilation of races in the United States. The fact is--and it is perfectly plain--that there has been no assimilation in the United States, and, more than that, does not deserve that there should be any assimilation or amalgamation of races in the United States. That is not what we need. That is not for our best advantage in this country. What we want is numerous races with various history, with various gifts, with various abilities, living side by side in concord, not in discord, and each contributing its own peculiar quality to the mixed population."

Now, that does not sound very much like the exploited theory of the melting pot; but that is sociology, and that is logic, and that is fact, and the other is a pseudo-scientific myth based on nothing. For races and nations to live in concord with one another it is not at all necessary that they be forced into one mould, so that they will all emerge looking alike, acting alike, thinking alike and speaking alike--a oneness, a sameness, a monotony. Life never was that and life never can be that. What is necessary for the well-being of mankind is that each race shall be given the opportunity to live its own life and express its own soul and offer its own great creative values upon the altar of our common life of humanity. Not uniformity but unity is the ideal of life.

What is true with races is true with religion. It is not enough for religions to tolerate one



another. Religions must learn to cooperate with one another; religions must recognize that no one religion is the repository of complete and perfect religious truth. Religions must recognize that no one religion is sufficient for mankind, and religions must recognize that the problem of evil in the world so so vast, so overwhelming and so treacherous that no one religion can successfully cope with it, but that it requires the whole-hearted cooperation of all races, each giving of its best, of its vision, of its peculiar message to wrestle with this universal problem of evil and suffering and wickedness and war in the world. ✓

The basis of such cooperation between nations as between religions, especially between religions, is this: first of all, mutual respect. Religions must learn to respect one another; religions must learn to acknowledge the providential mission which each has to perform in the world. Christianity must recognize the providential mission of Judaism in the world; Judaism must similarly recognize the providential mission of Christianity in the world. What is true of these two religions is true of Mohammedanism and Buddhism and Confucianism and every other great religion which touches the lives of millions of God's children and wings them to higher aspirations and to finer life. Mutual self-respect and mutual respect! ✓

No religion must, through propaganda or Sunday-school teaching or pamphlet or book or prayer or hymn, utter a word which throws aspersions upon another faith and



another people, which makes that faith and that people an object of abhorrence and contempt. The good, pious Christian somehow fails to realize how much of irreparable harm and how much of unconscious mischief he perpetrates within his religious school. He impregnates the minds of little children with that cruel story of how Jews once upon a time crucified that little one's Savior. I venture to say that today in enlightened lands there is very little of malice back of this teaching. It is almost habitual; it is a matter of course. Yet the poison is instilled in the minds and in the souls of little children, and it never, never quite leaves them. If Christians mean well by the descendents of those whose faith made possible Christianity, then that whole episode should be expunged from every text book, and every hymn, and every Sunday-school lesson.

Cooperation between religions is possible only when each will recognize, first, the individuality and the personality of the other and respect it; and, secondly, when all recognize their common needs and their common aspirations, those basic, elemental human things which they all intend to accomplish. When they will speak less of their dogmas and their creeds and their theologies, and reach down through the hard crust of the ages, the superficial crust, the meaningless crust, right down to the rich subsoil of human personality, of human life, of human needs, of human hopes, of human suffering, there they will find themselves on common ground, because there is the source--the fons et origo--the source, the mainspring.



and the ultimate goal of all religion. When religion will cease to speak so much of the things which differentiate them and speak a little more of the things which identify them, why, then they will quite easily and as a matter of course seek to cooperate. Then Christian will speak not of an ancient creed and not of an ancient ceremony and not of the walls of the churches, but of peace, the blessedness of peace.

"Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." And <sup>when</sup> the Jew likewise will begin to speak less of dogma, of creed, of orthodoxy, of form, of churches, synagogues, temples, walls, walls, and more of peace,--"And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their knives into pruning hooks," --Why, they will be driven, Christian and Jew, into a program of cooperation. Then Christian will begin to speak of justice. "Blessed are the righteous. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." That is Christianity. And when the Jew will begin to speak a little more earnestly of justice--"Justice shalt thou pursue,"--why, the two will then have a common goal; they are responding to common human needs; they will quite instinctively seek cooperation to effect and carry out a program which will bring a little more justice into the world, which will help to restore a man to his patrimony; which will give the children of God a chance to live--a chance to live in the world.

When Christian will begin to speak more and practice more--we speak a lot, we preach a lot, all of us,



all faiths, and then we cut each other's throats--when Jew and Christian begin to practice brotherhood--for that is what the master of Christianity urged--love not only your friends but love your enemies--when the Jew will begin to practice, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," why, the two will face one another and look clear to one another's souls, and reach out and grasp one another's hand, as it were, for the bring<sup>-ing</sup> about of the kingdom of God upon earth.

How can Christian and Jew help one another? Why, quite simply. By their return, each of them, to their ancient sources and ancient inspirations; by returning, each of them, to the sacred fires upon their altar--the Jew to the inspiration of his prophet, the Christian to the inspiration of his master, and by attempting to live those ideals, forgetting all the paraphernalia and all the accumulated theologic haberdashery of the twentieth century. By returning to the simple wholesome, dynamic, revolutionary ideals which their prophets preached, the Jew can help the Christian tremendously; not by denying himself, and not by hiding himself, and not by assimilating himself. He is merely adding to the millions of others that exist in the world.

The Jew can best help the Christian by remaining true to his Jewishness, to the highest conceptions of his race, by practicing the ideals of doing justly and loving mercy and walking humbly with God. The Jew can best serve the Christian not by becoming rich, or accumulating vast hoards of capital, by imitating the Christian, by building as



fine homes as he has, or finer, by dressing as ravishly as he does, or more ravishly, and by indulging in the same pleasures in which he indulges, only more so. No! The Jew can serve the Christian by endeavoring to live up to the exalted convictions of his race, and the Christian can help the Jew by living up to the exalted convictions of his faith; by extending opportunities, by inviting cooperation--for it is not enough for the Jew to invite cooperation; Cooperation is a two-man affair--by living and practicing brotherhood, justice, peace.

That is the program of the future, men and women. Cooperation among all the children of God.

A Rabbi once said: "I call heaven and earth to witness, that be a man white or black, be it man or woman, master or servant, bondsman or handmaid, according to their desserts will the spirit of God rest upon them." According to their desserts--their actions, will the holy spirit rest upon them. That is the basis of cooperation.

Be he white or black, man or woman, master or slave, rich or poor, according to their earnest, honest efforts and strivings, does the spirit of true religion, the holy spirit of the Omnipotent rest upon them and bless them.

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